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(U) Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U) No Such Agency

- (U) These days it takes either a highly specialized or a very brave authorto write about World War II without taking cryptology into account. This was also true to a somewhat lesser extent about many aspects of the ColdWar.
- (U) At NSA today, Public Affairs Officers interact with the media and individual inquirers with something more than "No Comment."
- (U) It was not always so. Traditionally, NSA maintained a very low publicprofile, characterized particularly by an aversion to media exposure. Forthe early decades of its existence, most seniors at the Agency argued thatany public discussion of cryptology served only to heighten the securityawareness of target nations, and was to be avoided as much as possible. This was the era when local jokes had it that the initials NSA stood for "NoSuch Agency," or, alternately, "Never Say Anything."
- (U) These two peripherally related articles discuss in a general way howcryptologic history "went public," then how the National Security Agencytransformed from "No Such Agency" to "Nothing Sacred Anymore."

PART I

- (U) Cryptology has long been a staple of mathematics departments at manyuniversities and some high schools. The academic field greatly expanded in the 1960s and 1970s when advances in communications technology and the Internet created increased commercial applications for what had been largely theory.
- (U) Cryptologic history, however, was little studied until the 1980s, due to the scarcity of source material. The secret war behind the shooting warswas known only to specialists and then only in part. Generally, it wentunappreciated by historians.
- (U) Some information about the history of codes and cryptanalysis was, ofcourse, available. The strategic release of the Zimmermann Telegram duringWorld War I, for example, resulted in a small but steady stream ofliterature about codebreaking during the Great War.
- (U) In 1931 Herbert O. Yardley, chief of America's first peacetime civilianintelligence

agency in the 1920s, revealed its existence -- and itsaccomplishments -- by publishing a "tell-all" memoir, *The American BlackChamber*. Whatever his morality, Yardley was a good storyteller, and thebook became a best-seller, heightening awareness of cryptanalysis among thegeneral public and target nations alike. (By the way, due to a loophole inthe espionage law, Yardley was not prosecuted for breaking silence. Theloophole has since been plugged.)

- (U) Immediately after World War II, Congress began public hearings into the disaster at Pearl Harbor. In the turmoil between a Republican Congress and Democratic administration, testimony revealed that the United States had solved the Japanese diplomatic code before the war, leading some to suggest that President Franklin Roosevelt had had prior knowledge of Japanese intentions but acted irresponsibly. The hearings failed to make aconvincing case for this, but, with the secret about codebreaking now in the open, they provided fodder for generations of conspiracy theorists.
- (U) Five important books in the 1960s and 1970s sparked the modern risingtide of revelations about official cryptology.
- (U) A professor and government consultant named Roberta Wohlstetterpublished *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* in 1962. Dr. Wohlstetter'sbook discussed decision-making processes prior to the disaster in Hawaii,including the role of cryptanalysis. The study provided interestinginsights into how government bureaucracies act, and was highly influentialamong scholars; it remained, however, little known to the general public. If it didn't coin the term "noise" (the overwhelming amount of worthlessmaterial hiding valuable nuggets of information), Dr. Wohlstetter's bookpopularized it among academics.
- (U) In 1967 David Kahn published *The Codebreakers: the Story of SecretWriting*, a 1,164-page compendium of cryptography and cryptanalysis fromancient times to the "threshold of outer space," as the book's blurbs putit. Kahn, a journalist at New York's Newsday, holds a doctorate in historyfrom Oxford; as a youth, he had read a popular history of codes, *Secret andUrgent* by Fletcher Pratt, which stimulated a lifelong fascination with them. *The Codebreakers* included a lengthy chapter on NSA, compiled from the fewavailable open sources; Kahn's description of the Agency was riddled withinaccuracies, but it was the first major literature on the subject. UnlikeWohlstetter's book, Kahn's tome sold well to the public, despite its massivesize and hefty price.
- -(U//FOUO) NSA seniors, believing as they did that any attention drawn to the subject was bound to result in a loss of sources, discussed possible ways tominimize what they perceived as damage to American security. In the end, they decided there was nothing to do but ride it out, and merely issuedinstructions to NSA employees and the Service Cryptologic Elements not tocomment on Kahn's book.

(U) Also in 1967, Ladislas Farago, author of popular military histories, retold the story of the Pacific War from an intelligence perspective in *TheBroken Seal*. Farago included a considerable amount of information aboutcryptologic organization and activity from open sources. His book sold welland served as one of the inspirations for the motion picture *Tora, Tora, Tora*. The film, by the way, unfolding in semidocumentary style, devotedconsiderable screen time to prewar cryptanalytic efforts in addition to afaithful rendition of the Japanese attack on Hawaii.

- (U) Up to this point, print discussions of World War II codebreaking hadbeen largely confined to rehashing what little was known about the Americaneffort against the Japanese. Virtually nothing had been released, andtherefore virtually nothing was written, about the extensive Allied effortagainst German systems. It is a tribute to the discretion of the thousandsinvolved in COMINT in the European Theater that the secret had never beendivulged. But this changed in 1974.
- (U) In that year, a former officer in the Royal Air Force who wished toimpress the younger generation with how near a thing victory in World War IIhad been and also to pay tribute to wartime cryptologists before theirgeneration passed away, F. W. Winterbotham, wrote *The Ultra Secret*. Thisbook revealed for the first time the very great extent to which British andAmerican cryptanalysts had exploited German codes and ciphers and how theinside information had been used.
- (U) Winterbotham's book was flawed, but its influence was enormous. TheBritish government had declined his request to review wartime documents, andhe therefore had to write strictly from memory. Since he had been involved in distributing COMINT, not preparing it, his description of the production process was somewhat skewed. The Ultra Secret also generated a number of "urban legends" about wartime COMINT that persist to this day, but, byrevealing the existence of COMINT in the European war, it stimulated the further release of information.
- (U) With the "lid off," other British and American participants in wartimeCOMINT began publishing their memoirs, some with and some without their government's permission. This cottage industry on wartime COMINT put agreat deal of information into the public domain in a fairly short period of time.
- (U) Historians may be argumentative by nature, and heated discussions about the Second World War were and are a common aspect of academic life. However, most historians had assumed by the 1970s that almost all majorfacts about the war were available, and arguments would only revolve around what those facts meant. With the revelations concerning cryptology, historians recognized they now confronted a completely hidden aspect of thewar that would force them to re-evaluate and re-argue most of the events, personalities, and decisions of the war. Their joy was unconfined.

(U) If anything, historians' interest in wartime COMINT was exceeded by thatof veterans and their families. Here was a source that gave the hithertounknown background of events they had participated in. Many regarded thematerial as a kind of key to help understand more fully the events that hadmade up a significant portion of their lives.

- (U) Both historians and veterans actively sought additional releases of cryptologic information about the war.
- (U) Since the United States and Great Britain had worked together underbilateral agreements to exploit Japanese and German systems in World War II, it was necessary to coordinate any new policy on declassification. NSA and GCHQ agreed to a carefully defined program of releases, with U.S. documents to go to the National Archives, British documents to the Public RecordOffice.
- (U) Confronted with millions of pages of documents that potentially could bereleased, and realizing that some of them might still need protection, NSAsought more limited releases at first. The staff of declassification officers, a few reemployed annuitants, reviewed and redacted (i.e., blackedout portions still considered sensitive) key prewar and wartime documents and released them as SRHs -- Special Research Histories -- to the National Archives.
- (U) Although researchers found the SRHs useful and interesting, thisself-censorship satisfied nobody. Historians wanted originals. Furthermore, changes to declassification policies and the Freedom ofInformation Act (FOIA) in the 1970s required more openness in declassifyingdocuments. Eventually, DIRNSA Admiral Bobby Inman decided to proceed withmore declassification of records from World War II. The processing effortwas expanded.
- (U) Increased declassification meant more published histories that dealtexclusively with or incorporated COMINT. And ongoing declassification meantcontinuing interaction with scholars and other interested members of thepublic. Several successive NSA directors or deputy directors used the Public Affairs Office or Center for Cryptologic History as a point of contact for this effort.
- -(U//FOUO) The fifth book that heightened awareness of cryptology and helpedshape NSA's public image was James Bamford's *The Puzzle Palace*, published in1982. Bamford was an intrepid researcher who combined information alreadyin the public domain with documents obtained through the FOIA process andwith interviews. His book contained a number of inaccuracies and exaggerations, but provided a generally rounded portrait of the Agency wherenone had previously existed. His book also generated considerable negativecomment in the workforce and ill will toward some of his sources.

- (U) One additional large declassification action also captured the attention of historians, media persons, and the general public, and helped change theway Americans viewed another part of their past.
- (U) "VENONA" was a made-up word for a project that exploited espionagecommunications from the USSR. Access to parts of Soviet wartime espionagemessages helped the Federal Bureau of Investigation identify dozens of Americans who had spied for the Soviets and was the hidden basis for manyspy cases in the 1940s and 1950s. However, with diminishing returns for the Agency's efforts in the 1980s, the program was terminated and VENONA was put into storage.
- (U) The person who "turned out the lights" on VENONA, as he liked to say, was William P. Crowell, and by 1995 Bill Crowell was NSA's deputy director. Several successive directors had decided NSA must interact more with theoutside, and the D/DIR believed that, like it or not, history constituted 85percent of what NSA could talk about in any unclassified venue. Crowellwanted to declassify VENONA, believing that the positive story would reflectcredit on the Agency; the DCI also believed release of the story wouldbenefit the entire intelligence community. About the same time, NSA received a strong appeal on VENONA under the FOIA law. The appeal onlyserved to convince Crowell that it was time to declassify the VENONA translations.

(U//FOUO) Crowell created a group to expedite release of VENONA, including declassifiers, public affairs officers, attorneys, and historians, centered in the Office of Policy. Considerable effort was expended in coordination with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other government entities that might have equity in the VENONA project.

- (U) VENONA was released publicly in a joint NSA-CIA gala ceremony at CIAheadquarters in July 1995. Senator Daniel Moynihan, who had an academicinterest in the VENONA period, was a prominent participant.
- (U) Once released, VENONA spurred historians to re-evaluate aspects of earlyCold War history, much as the release of World War II cryptology hadimpelled many reconsiderations of wartime events. Historians and ournalists took VENONA seriously, but an inevitable by-product washeightened awareness of NSA and cryptanalysis.
- (U) By the mid- to late 1990s, cryptologic history had taken its placebeside cryptologic mathematics as an academic subject. Ample data were nowavailable, and the continuing declassification program fed hungry andargumentative historians.

(U) According to a probably apocryphal but possibly true tale, Roy Banner, senior attorney at NSA, approached Director Lew Allen after thecongressional investigations of the 1970s had put NSA on the front pages, and volunteered to handle his public relations. "Bad career move," the director was supposed to have replied, "I don't intend to have any."

- (U) For most of its existence, NSA successfully maintained a low profile, punctuated by occasional short periods of media notoriety, as when Martinand Mitchell defected in 1960, or with disasters such as the LIBERTY incident in 1967. From the mid-1960s on, even as academics, novelists, and movie producers increasingly portrayed the Central Intelligence Agency as a "secret government" or as full of rogue agents spinning nefarious plots, news media and fictioneers alike generally ignored NSA. The Agency's management, which believed there was no such thing as good publicity aboutcryptology, was quite content with that.
- (U) Stimulated by the revelations of a series of books about cryptology, NSAaccelerated a program of declassification of World War II documents that generated additional interest in the organization and activities. Quiteapart from this public attention, however, NSA in the 1970s took some smallsteps that eventually led to greater interaction with the media and public.
- (U) In 1979 the director of the Smithsonian Museum of American History askedNSA's director, Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, for assistance in preparing anexhibition of cipher machines. Inman responded positively, and authorizedlending items from World War II, including a German ENIGMA machine and aU.S. SIGABA (carefully modified to remove some still secret workings). Thetwo directors opened the exhibit on 26 February 1981. A few years later, NSA lent the Smithsonian the last remaining cryptanalytic bombe from WorldWar II, arguably the crown jewel of NSA's artifact collection.
- (U) The Smithsonian exhibits were an important first step in educating thepublic about the crucial and beneficial role of cryptology in Americanhistory.
- (U) In addition to the modest declassification program discussed in Part 1,the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) caused releases of information aboutcryptology or NSA. In 1966, in response to public fears that the classification system was being used to hide government misconduct ormistakes, Congress passed the FOIA law, which empowered citizens to requestdocuments or other information, classified or not, from governmentorganizations. The government organization involved had to release the requested materials or justify nonrelease on specific grounds, "protection of intelligence sources or methods" being one.
- -(U//FOUO) NSA released some documents to FOIA requesters, mostly dealingwith administrative matters, but in the early days was generally successfulin forestalling release of sensitive material on national security grounds. However, FOIA requesters had the right

of administrative appeal and also could take the government to court if their request were refused. Increasingly, courts became less willing to accept a blanket statement of "national security" as a reason for denying release of material. But, even though courts sided more often than before with plaintiffs, the burden of proof was still on the requester to justify why material should be released.

- (U) With the end of the Cold War and the demise of America's primaryadversary came a widespread feeling in the public and among some ingovernment that much of the secrecy that had shrouded defense and intelligence matters was no longer necessary. While some things would stillrequire protection, this trend of thought went, American taxpayers deserved to see what they got for their money. This trend culminated in ExecutiveOrder 12958, issued by President Bill Clinton on April 17, 1995. This EOmandated review of all nonexempt documents 25 years old or older; release of these documents would be automatic if they were not reviewed. The EO alsoreversed the philosophy behind releases: the burden of proof was now on the government to justify keeping a document classified, and the grounds for exemption were narrowly defined.
- (U) In response to the executive order and the new orientation, NSA'sArchives and Records Center, working with private industry, designed anautomated system for support of document review. This resulted in a"declassification factory," which began operations in 1998, and which putNSA in the lead in the intelligence community in reviewing its documentholdings.
- (U) A succession of directors beginning with Admiral William O. Studeman in the early 1990s made decisions to become more involved with the surrounding community. With the end of the Cold War there was less justification for the traditional low profile, and, in fact, some benefits might be obtained by a more visible public presence in the changed atmosphere.
- (U) The Agency's leadership realized that NSA was one of the largestemployers in central Maryland and that the organization and its employeeswere significant consumers of county or state services as well as heavycontributors to them. Studeman made some public speeches, unusual if notunprecedented for a DIRNSA, and had NSA officials interact with the Baltimore-Washington Parkway Chamber of Commerce or state and countyagencies.
- (U) The leadership decided other public activities would benefit NSAdirectly or indirectly. For example, NSA had a stake in ensuring excellencein mathematics instruction, since it would expect to recruit heavily in that discipline for years to come. The Agency therefore undertook initiatives to foster good teaching in local schools and universities, and to provide instructional resources.
- (U) Although a more advanced public posture still made many inside the

fenceuncomfortable, NSA's anonymity, once breached, could not be restored.

(U//FOUO) In November 1965 DIRNSA Marshall Carter named a part-time NSAliaison officer with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. In December 1966 the title was changed, the position became full time, andthe incumbent was placed on the director's staff. In July 1973 anothertitle change created the Agency's "Public Affairs Officer"; by the end ofthe year, the PAO was resubordinated from the director's office to the Policy staff.

- (U) Today's Public Affairs Office began as a desk-level operation in the FOIA Office in the late 1980s, then was raised to a two-person team in the Office of Information Policy. The PAO maintained a strictly reactive posture, and it was understood that its purpose was to make mediare presentatives go away -- with a smile, if possible, but to go away!
- (U) Discussions of a more active media policy began under Admiral McConnell, relating to some of the issues discussed above. However, initially it wasfelt that while NSA was becoming more involved with the community, as acorporation it was not ready to engage in additional openness with themedia. Two programs of the mid-1990s forced NSA into a more open stance. Ironically, both originated with NSA itself.
- -(U//FOUO) The opening of the National Cryptologic Museum in December 1993forced NSA to interact directly with the public and the media. The PAOconfronted unforeseen questions such as how to allow photography on Agencygrounds. Once the media discovered the museum -- the first major mentionwas a tongue-in-cheek piece in the Washington Post in early 1994 under thetitle "Only Sleuths Can Find This Museum" -- inquiries from other mediaincreased exponentially. Each wanted something different, perhaps somethingmore, than their competitors.

(U//FOUO) The second issue that forced NSA into a more public stance was the Clipper Chip. Dealing with public cryptography of increasing strength, NSA became a proponent of clipper chip -- the chip was a computer encryption system in which the key for decryption would be filed in "escrow" and would be obtainable by law enforcement authorities only if their evidence wassufficient to convince a judge to issue a warrant. This proposition raised the suspicions and hackles of many segments of the public as a challenge toprivacy rights; NSA became a participant, and ultimate loser, in thenational debate that ensued.

(U//FOUO) When Air Force general Kenneth Minihan succeeded Admiral McConnellas DIRNSA, the new director recognized a need to find positive stories about the Agency that could be presented publicly. The museum was fodder for manyarticles and broadcasts, but additional stories were released aboutactivities, such as technical research, that could be told without harm tooperations. The trend was continued, even accelerated, under General Haydenuntil the terrorist events of September 2001.

(U//FOUO) In late 1996 the director, after nearly two years of discussion, agreed to one of the long-standing media requests for cooperation in adocumentary television program about the Agency -- for the first time toinclude videotaping inside NSA buildings. The Public Affairs Officeconvened a working group to assist in facilitating the project. The groupgently reworked a draft script submitted by the filmmaker, helping toeliminate some of its tendencies toward science fiction and inject realityabout NSA in it. The production crew worked at NSA in April 1997, tapingprimarily in the museum (which was an unclassified, public area anyway) butalso inside the headquarters building and on the campus under carefullycontrolled circumstances.

(U//FOUO) The resultant documentary program, aired on the Discovery Channel, while not entirely free of error or sensational claims, presented agenerally fair and balanced view of NSA. It had immediate positive impact-- and continues to do so, since educational channels usually rerun their programming into eternity.

- (U) NSA had in small, incremental steps -- some of its own choosing, someforced on it by circumstances -- moved from an organization with anexceptionally low profile in the 1980s to one that was a "household name" inthe 1990s.
- (U) Public interaction had some desired effects on NSA's image, but therewas a down side as well. Since NSA was now "newsworthy," media oftendevoted space or time to real or speculative information about NSA and SIGINT, revealing more than Agency personnel would have liked. Also, perhaps because of the novelty factor, academics, novelists, and movieproducers increasingly portrayed NSA as a danger to the privacy rights of Americans, or as full of rogue agents spinning nefarious plots, the way they had once treated CIA.
- (U) Even though major public events such as the Discovery Channel programcame later in the decade, what epitomized NSA's public emergence for many inthe workforce was the installation in March 1991 of a sign at the highwayentrance to NSA's headquarters building. The buildings had been visible from the highway since the 1960s, and those who wanted to know the Agency's location, whether for good or ill, could pinpoint it easily, but no explicit dentification had ever been erected. Given this previously prevailing culture of anonymity, the placement of a highly visible roadside signboardwas a surprise, even a shock, to many employees.
- (U) But there it was. A big block with a plaque, a blue background and thelegend "National Security Agency." Not you-know-what.

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